Programs and Services

Farm and Food Report, Week of March 13, 2006

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SASKATCHEWAN'S CULINARY ZEST FEATURED IN JAPAN

Well aware that presentation is key to impressing the audience of a magazine featuring professional cooking, Chef Rob Fuller of Zest Restaurant in Regina recently put on a stunning Saskatchewan gastronomical experience for some of the world's most sophisticated palates — Japanese guests.

Chef Fuller was approached by Saskatchewan Trade and Export Partnership (STEP) and Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food (SAF) to use his culinary skills and creativity to prepare dishes featuring Saskatchewan products for two discerning guests: editor Ritsuo Saito and photographer Yuhei Ohyama with Senmon-Ryori, the Magazine of Professional Cooking in Japan.

The monthly magazine has a distribution of over 80,000 and a readership of chefs and food service industry insiders across Japan. Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) and the Canadian Embassy worked to bring Mr. Saito and Mr. Ohyama to Canada, and gave the provinces the opportunity to showcase local foods for them.

The group, which was accompanied by Maki Mizuhara, the Canadian Trade Commissioner for Nagoya, Japan, traveled across Western Canada in January to seek products worthy of highlighting: Canadian meat products, healthy grains and berries. During their short visit in Saskatchewan, STEP and SAF hosted a luncheon at Zest Restaurant with the delegation and the Saskatchewan producers who supplied the products for the meal.

The Saskatchewan products profiled were: saskatoon berries from Riverbend Plantation (http://www.saskatoonberry.com/) and Prairie Berries (http://www.prairieberries.com/); roasted golden flax from Can-Mar Grain Products (http://www.roastedflax.com/); organic pearl barley from Poplar Valley Organics (http://www.cluborganic.ca/) and organic beef also from Poplar Valley Organics, in conjunction with Thomson Meats (http://www.rascalsfoods.com/info.html); wild boar and Berkshire pork, a Japanese favorite, supplied by Saskatoon Specialty Meats (http://www.specialtymeats.ca/); wild rice and wild mushrooms from Northern Lights Foods (http://www.northernlightsfoods.com/); and bison from Canadian Prairie Bison.

A mini-trade show was organized following the luncheon, where the photographer and editor were able to interview each supplier and ask questions about their products.

Photos of the dishes Chef Fuller prepared with the companies' showcased products will be featured in the spring edition of the magazine with a 10- to 12-page spread on the journalists' culinary discoveries while in Canada. The release of the issue coincides with the world trade fair, FOODEX Japan, which runs from March 13 to 17, 2006.

This initiative is remarkable for the collaborative spirit displayed by STEP, SAF, AAFC and the Canadian Embassy in Japan. This kind of effort can foster unique opportunities for Saskatchewan companies hoping to put themselves in front of potential buyers in export markets.

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DERIVING DIVERSITY ON THE FARM THROUGH AGROFORESTRY

The Saskatchewan Forest Centre (SFC) is putting on a conference in Saskatoon on March 21 and 22, 2006, on the subject of "Deriving Diversity on the Farm through Agroforestry." Organizers hope to attract farmers, researchers and government representatives to discuss the future of this emerging economic sector in Saskatchewan, according to SFC's Joanne Kowalski.

"We wanted to get people together to talk about the opportunities in agroforestry, so we put together a two-day event that would allow the dissemination of research," she says. "I am sure there are farmers who want to know what research is going on, and some researchers who want to know what opportunities exist in their chosen field, as well."

Mark Shepherd, an American consultant, will give a presentation entitled "Diversification from a Wisconsin Experience." Shepherd is actively involved in agroforestry in Wisconsin and with all the on-farm diversification it can lead to.

Later on, in "A Perspective from the Poplar Council of Canada," silvoculturalist, consultant and poplar expert, Cees van Oosten, will share some of what he has learned on the ground.

"Mr. van Oosten is actually doing some work through our Forest Development Fund, in partnership with Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food and the Canadian Forest Service, on preparing a hybrid poplar growing manual, and is looking at some crop densities for hybrid poplars on the prairies," says Kowalski. "He has lots of experience growing poplar, and he knows the physiology and the trees really well. We wanted to get his input."

This presentation will be followed by a session on "Silvopasture: a Component of Tree Farming," with Phil Leduc of Prairie Agricultural Machinery Institute (PAMI). The SFC has a silvopasture demonstration site through its Forest Development Fund. This is a collaboration among PAMI, the Farm Co-operators and the Agri-Food Innovation Fund (AFIF).

"Later on, we'll have a session on 'Alternative Agroforestry Systems: Fruits and Nuts' with Bob Bors of the University of Saskatchewan," says Kowalski. "He is the fruit tree breeder. After that, Kurt Chesley of Forintek Canada Corp./SFC will talk about 'Agroforestry and Niche Markets'—which niche markets need to be filled and which poplar products can answer these needs."

The conference participants will also be invited to pick up a paper in which the Saskatchewan Forest Centre is promoting a community development model that would incorporate trees.

"If you had a hog barn, you could plant trees around the barn, reduce energy costs and diffuse odours, but you could also fertilize the trees with the hog effluent, and, eventually, the community could have a sawmill or other industries that could produce value-added products. It is an integrated model that corresponds to each community's vision. Doug Currie of the Saskatchewan Forest Centre will look after that one," Kowalski says.

There will also be a session entitled "Future Paths for Farming Trees," with Bill Sullivan, the president of Parkland Agroforestry. Parkland is a group that has been around for a long time and has lots of demonstration sites. Parkland is engaged in a number of key initiatives. Sullivan, himself, produces hybrid poplars and cattle, and he is starting to grow some fruit trees. Organizers picked him to speak because he is an example of what can be done in agroforestry.

The session takes place at the Park Town Hotel in the Oak Room. Registration is $50.00 for the two days or $25.00 for one. To register, contact Kowalski at the Forest Centre at 765-2840.

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CRESTED WHEATGRASS - A GRASS FOR EARLY PASTURES

Crested wheatgrass is native to the dry and cold plains of Russia, western Siberia and central Asia. It was introduced to the Canadian Prairies during "the Dirty '30s," and many of these stands still exist today. Crested wheatgrass was a solution to many soil erosion problems.

As Saskatchewan landowners convert more of their annual cropland to forages, crested wheatgrass should be kept in mind when developing new pastures, according to Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food Forage Development Specialist, Glenn Barclay.

"A crested wheatgrass pasture, used exclusively for grazing first thing in the spring, can greatly reduce the grazing pressure on native range and tame pastures," Barclay says. "Providing a period of rest for the other pastures will replenish growth and return vigour."

Crested wheatgrass reaches full production about one month earlier than most native grasses. Studies at the Lethbridge Research Station in Alberta showed that crested wheatgrass produced about 90 per cent of its total annual yield before mid-June. In contrast, native range grasses do not normally reach their peak production until late June, and produce only 35 per cent of their total annual yield by mid-June.

"Having a crested wheatgrass pasture divided into two or more paddocks and situated close to a home base is a good idea," says Barclay. "It will provide early spring grazing that is easy to monitor, and will allow moving cattle to another crested wheatgrass paddock when required. Remember that different paddocks should be used at the start of each grazing season so that the same paddock isn't used year after year."

The early growth of crested wheatgrass is high in protein, and is palatable to all classes of livestock. Palatability drops off markedly over the summer, as the plant matures and becomes dormant in hot weather. If a summer supplies lots of rain, the plant may maintain palatable growth throughout most of the season. Fall growth can also start quickly when wet weather arrives.

Barclay notes that is advisable not to seed another grass with crested wheatgrass in a new pasture.

"The grasses will grow and mature at different times, and be palatable at different times. Allowing crested wheatgrass to develop into coarse plants that are not consumed could result in under-utilization for next year's grazing season," he says.

When the end of June arrives, the cattle should be moved onto the native range or tame pasture, Barclay points out.

"If there is sufficient carry-over or regrowth, the cattle can still graze the crested wheatgrass if needed," he says. "This trait can be very useful in drought years. During hot, dry periods, the grass can become dormant, and this trait reduces injury from the elements. It withstands close grazing and trampling, and it competes well with other plants."

There are two species of crested wheatgrass: Agropyron cristatum, known as the Fairway type, and Agropyron desertorum, called the standard type. Both types are very hardy, long-lived perennial bunchgrasses that have a non-creeping, deep root system. The two species will not cross with each other.

The Fairway or diploid type is a finer-stemmed, leafier, lower-growing grass, and has more uniform growth than standard crested wheatgrass. It provides more complete ground cover than standard crested wheatgrass. The upper surfaces of the

leaves of this crested wheatgrass are covered with fine hairs, and the plants are usually bright green in colour.

The standard or tetraploid type has a larger number of chromosomes in the cell nucleus than the Fairway type. This grass grows slightly taller than the Fairway type, and has a long, narrow seed head. The leaves of the standard type are not usually hairy. The tetraploid types remain greener than the diploid types under severe drought.

Barclay is quick to mention that crested wheatgrass does well on most soils, but it is most noted for its ability to establish itself on sandy soils.

"It has some tolerance to saline soils," he says, "but many other grass species are better adapted to that kind of environment. It will tolerate only seven to 10 days of spring flooding."

Germination of crested wheatgrass is normally high if not seeded too deep. Seedlings are vigorous and develop rapidly under good growing conditions. If the conditions are dry, the seed will lie dormant in the soil until there is sufficient moisture for germination.

If crested wheatgrass is used for hay, cut it shortly after it comes into head or before blooming. The protein content of the grass decreases as it matures, and it becomes coarse.

Keep in mind that the bunching growth habit allows space for other plants to grow. Mixing a legume with crested wheatgrass can have satisfactory results.

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WESTERN CANADIAN WHEAT GROWERS TO MEET IN SASKATOON

Solutions for Profitable Agriculture will be the theme of the upcoming Western Canadian Wheat Growers Association (WCWGA) conference in Saskatoon on March 15, 16 and 17, 2006.

"We are happy to host our convention in Saskatchewan this year, as it usually rotates among the three Prairie Provinces. There are great things on the agenda," says Cherilyn Jolly, president of the WCWGA.

Organizers have put together a program that is sure to generate a lot of debate, she says.

"I am most looking forward to the Australian Outlook speaker, Neil Wandell, the Deputy Chairman of Co-operative Bulk Handling Ltd. He will be coming all the way from Australia on that occasion. My husband and I went to Australia a couple of years ago, and had an opportunity to work with Neil on his farm, doing some custom harvesting, and we have kept in touch ever since in various other capacities. The economic outlook for pulse and wheat growers will be discussed. So I am really looking forward to having Neil come down to share his perspective."

Co-operative Bulk Handling Ltd is owned by group of farmers that got together to co-ordinate efforts within the agriculture industry. They own flour mills and various other properties around the world that handle commodities, explains Jolly.

"There will be some examples of what can be done to draw from the Australian experience," Jolly says.

Jolly feels the WCWGA is playing an important role in shaping agriculture policy in Canada.

"We are stronger than ever with our new board of directors. We are all farmers, first of all. The majority of us are under the age

of 35. We very much have a vested interest in the future of agriculture. All the policy decisions we put forward are done with new energy and enthusiasm. We fully respect what has happened in the industry, but this industry is in trouble. We are in a bit of a crisis coming into seeding, and decisions need to be made," Jolly says.

"We look at all options and policy orientations. For instance, bioenergy is an area we are looking at, and how we can make sure that each of our farms is able to succeed. This is why we have invited Brian Hayward, CEO of Agricore United, who will talk about Canadian and global trends in agriculture,

something he would know pretty well. We want to look beyond the farmgate; we want to look beyond our neighbours as competition and to think much more globally. Brian will bring to light for us trends that he sees coming over the next few years."

To find out more about the WCWGA conference, download the draft agenda at:
http://www.wheatgrowers.ca/pdf/convention/2006/2006Program_Draft.pdf

The conference takes place at the Delta Bessborough in Saskatoon.

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EVALUATION OF FENCING COSTS FOR LIVESTOCK AVAILABLE ONLINE

Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food recently posted an updated evaluation of fencing costs for livestock production on its website.

The publication compares the building costs of barbed wire, high-tensile smooth wire, barbed wire suspension and two-strand electric fencing. Wally Vanin, a Forage Development Specialist with Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food, carried out the study.

"The published numbers that were available until now hadn't been updated for some time," he says. "The updated fencing cost publication will help producers evaluate the options they have for fencing new pastures."

The study found that fencing costs are highest for a four-strand barbed wire all-post fence. The cheapest fence to erect is the 110-volt two-strand high-tensile wire electric fence; however, it requires a 110-volt power source at some point along the fence, and also requires more monitoring than a four-strand barbed wire fence. The two-strand electric fence costs about $1,500 a mile, whereas a four-strand barbed wire fence might cost closer to $3,200 a mile.

"The cost is about half of that of conventional barbed wire fences," Vanin explains. "There are other advantages to electric fencing, in that it is more flexible for use. It can be moved. Therefore, it has a higher salvage value in the end."

Fencing and water development are significant costs in developing pasture. This publication should help farmers evaluate which fencing option is best for them. Producers who are interested in developing pastures this spring might be interested in the information the publication contains. For instance, electric fence installation represents significantly less labour than conventional barbed wire fence.

"The traditional four-strand barbed wire fence may not require as much monitoring as an electric fence, and is often preferred for more remote locations," he says.

The publication contains lists of material and cost estimates to construct one mile of perimeter fence for six types of fences. PST and GST are not included in the cost calculations.

Custom or hired fencing costs may be higher than on-farm labour costs because of the contractor's profit margin charge. The custom fencer may also want to recover the full rate, including a profit margin for the tractor and post-pounder.

Fencing labour costs are estimated on the basis of a two-person team. Fencing can be more time-consuming if the soil is dry, if there are sloughs, bush, or rough terrain to be fenced, or if large fence posts are used. Fencing costs will vary when the space between posts is increased or decreased.

The study can be viewed at: livestock/beef/production_information/fencing.asp

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